

THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT HARRIDAN,
OR THE PROVOST'S TAX.
BY ALVAN MARLA W.

(Apologizing to the shade of Coleridge.)

It is an ancient harridan,
A Provost stoppeth she;
"By thy red hair and bawdy gown,
Now wherefore stopst thou me?"

"There is a tax"—At that dread word,
Sore trembled Provost B.—
"Let go thy hold, thou beldam old,
I know thee not," said he,
"I consort not with witches vile,
Nor keep lewd companie."

She clutched him closer than before,
He cannot choose but stand;
And thus spake on that ancient crone,
The red haired harridan.

"I am the State, your mistress dear,
To whom you once did pay,
The homage of your youthful vows,
But now—ah! Well-a-way.

"Unhand me, ancient Harridan,
Uncleek thy filthy claws!
Am I not rich? therefore immune
From all thy tiresome laws?"

The harridan whose hair is red,
She grinned a hideous grin,
And clutched him closer than before,
With fingers crooked and thin.

"There is a tax, a golden fee,
Which all my lovers pay,
And for this tax may break my laws
A hundred times a day.

The law rests lightly on the rich,
Who dwell in gilded hall,
Let them but give me gold and they
May flout my statutes all.

The law bears heavy on the poor,
A thing of daily dread,
It binds them down to ceaseless toil,
And tears and scanty bread;
It lays a hand upon their heart,
And weighs it down like lead.

A hungry workman takes a hare
From a rich lord's domain;
My sharp clutch closes on him and
To prison straight he's ta'en.

The full fed social parasite,
When he has given me gold,
Can any day go forth and slay,
Of hares a hundred fold.

Strong drink it is the poor man's bane,
A demon stark and fell,
It binds his soul with a burning chain,
And drags him down to hell.

I have decreed, to sell strong drink,
Is crime and mortal sin;
Yet who gives me my golden fee
The sin may wallow in.

It is a crime with love to sit
At nature's altar feast,
But fee the state and you may sate
Your lust like any beast.

For gold it is my greatest need,
It gives me magic power,
To rule the world from day to day,
And eke from hour to hour.

With gold I arm the workman poor,
And pay him wretched fee,
To slay his brother working men,
In lands across the sea;
While you for whom 'tis done may loll
In ease and luxury.

With gold I bribe the hireling scribe,
To scribble daily lies,
The parson, eke, so smug and sleek,
To blind the workers' eyes,
With visions sweet of bliss complete,
In a future paradise.

And thus divert their minds inert
From present ills and pains,
Lest wrathful they arise one day,
Asunder burst their chains;
And with the shattered fragments strew
The causeway with our brains.

My craft and guile alone preserve
Your class from this grim fate,
I stand between the worthless drones
And the workers' honest hate.

Then grudge no more to give me gold.
But curb your stupid greed,
The day that you deny me gold
Sees your own doom decreed,
And human labour stand upright,
From shame and bondage freed.

He gave the gruesome harlot gold,
And to his home was borne,
A sadder and a flyer man
He rose the morrow morn.

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